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Subject EPA releases for public comment draft scientific study of
Bristol Bay Watershed

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Report assesses potential impacts of mining activity in the area

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(May 18, 2012—Seattle) The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency today released for public comment a draft scientific study of the Bristol Bay watershed and its natural resources. EPA's report responds to growing interest in large-scale mining in the watershed from a number of stakeholders and local communities with a range of views and will lead to a better understanding of potential environmental impacts of these activities on the watershed. Under the Clean Water Act, EPA has the authority and responsibility to protect the nation's water and perform scientific studies that enhance the agency's and the public's knowledge of water resources. EPA's focus in the assessment is scientific and technical; the agency has made no judgments about the use of its regulatory authority under the Clean Water Act and the draft study in no way prejudices future consideration of proposed mining activities.

The report assesses the watershed's natural resources and the economic benefits associated with those resources, including the largest undisturbed wild sockeye salmon run in the world. EPA's draft study does not provide an in-depth assessment of any specific mining project, but instead assesses the potential environmental impacts associated with mining activities at a scale and with the characteristics that are realistically anticipated, given the nature of mineral deposits in the watershed, the requirements for successful mining development, and publicly available information about potential mining activity. The report concludes that there is potential for certain activities associated with large-scale mining to have adverse impacts on the productivity and sustainability of the salmon fishery in the watershed. Potential impacts could include loss of habitat used for salmon spawning and rearing. The assessment, when finalized following the important public comment and independent peer review, could help inform future decisions on any large-scale mining in Bristol Bay by both federal and non-federal decision-makers.

The draft assessment focused on the Nushagak and Kvichak watersheds, which produce up to half of all

Bristol Bay salmon and are open to mining development under Alaska law.

Key findings in EPA's draft assessment include:

- All five species of North American Pacific salmon are found in Bristol Bay. The Bristol Bay watershed supports the largest sockeye salmon fishery in the world. The Kvichak River produces more sockeye salmon than any other river in the world. The Nushagak River is the fourth largest producer of Chinook salmon in North America.
- Bristol Bay's wild salmon fishery and other ecological resources provide at least 14,000 full and part-time jobs and is valued at about \$480 million annually.
- The average annual run of sockeye salmon is about 37.5 million fish.
- Bristol Bay provides habitat for numerous animal species, including 35 fish species, more than 190 bird species and 40 animal species.

EPA also examined the importance of Bristol Bay salmon in sustaining the traditional subsistence lifestyle of Alaska Native Villages in the watershed. The assessment includes detailed reports on Bristol Bay indigenous culture, wildlife and economics, as well as salmon and other fish.

EPA will take public comment on the draft assessment until July 23. The agency has also scheduled public meetings in Alaska in June and will host webinars for people interested in learning more about the assessment. EPA is also submitting the draft assessment for independent scientific peer review. All of this information will help guide a final report. For information on public meetings and how to submit comments, visit our website: <http://www.epa.gov/region10/bristolbay/>.

For more information on EPA's Bristol Bay Watershed Assessment and to read the assessment, visit: <http://www.epa.gov/region10/bristolbay/>

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